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Moved by the Spirit: Evangelical Presbyterian Women and Authority in the Early Modern Atlantic World

By

Chasity Hunt

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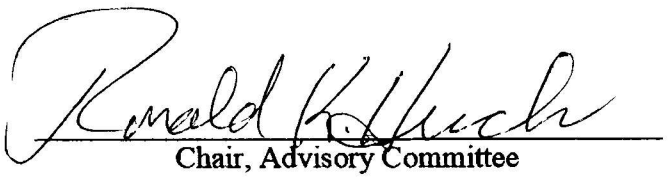

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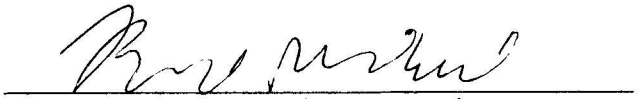

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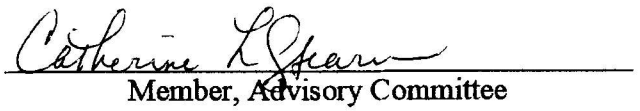

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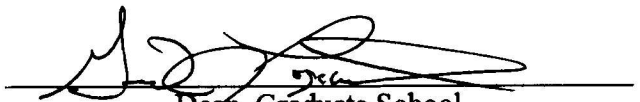

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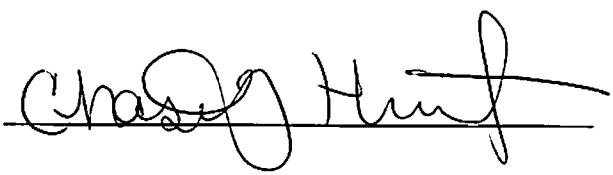
Signature 

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# Moved by the Spirit: Evangelical Presbyterian Women in the Early Modern Atlantic World

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
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DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my mother,
DeeAnn Berger, my grandmothers, Anna Lou, Gladys and Margret as well as my aunt,
Phyllis Cornwell, and especially Al.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Ronald Huch, for years of guidance, inspiration, and liberty in the pursuit of history. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Catherine Stearn and Dr. Brad Wood, for their everlasting patience and advice as well as the entire History Department Family. I would also like to thank my friends and family who often made sacrifices in order for this work to be finished.

ABSTRACT

Revivalism existed as a cultural feature within Scottish Presbyterian society decades before the famous transatlantic revivals of the eighteenth-century. Although, many aspects of those revivals have been examined, such as the Holy Fairs, historians and scholars have largely overlooked the extensive body of memoirs and accounts featuring Scottish Presbyterian women in Scotland and the greater Atlantic world, and their experiences within these revivals. This study seeks to undercover the relationship of those women to evangelicalism and revivalism as it exists as a cultural event imbedded with symbols. In order to accomplish that goal, this paper looks at the history of Holy Fairs and revivals within Scottish society and how three women wrote about their experiences of those events. By experiencing the workings of the Holy Spirit during times of revival those woman were able to lay claim to spiritual authority within their communities, they did so by writing about their spiritual lives and extending their voices to generations beyond their own through publication which suggests that evangelicalism within the Presbyterian Church created a public space for religious women that can be traced from the denomination's beginnings, and even before within Scottish Catholicism.

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## Part 1: Introduction

In July of 1637 a minister of St. Giles Cathedral was allegedly assaulted by a woman wielding a small stool as her weapon. The woman, Jenet Geddes, disagreed with the minister's intent to use the *Book of Common Prayer* which was recently proscribed for the Scottish Church by King Charles I and his episcopal counselors. Therefore, when the minister began to read from the book, she stood and lobbed her stool at his head. For this act of rebellion the woman essentially became a Scottish folk hero and to this day a statue of a small stool stands in her honor inside St. Giles.[1]

Behavior such that undertaken by Geddes should have upset many traditional figures of authority, and it certainly did. However, there is evidence that her actions, as well as those belonging to other women concerned in the riots, were well received by some of their male peers. For instance, David, the second Earl of Wemys, left an account of the St. Giles riot that speaks of the women in admirable terms:

> sum Religius men and women of all sortes did so heat iit [the prayer book] that they would not premitt itt to be read in Edinburgh…good religious wimen did rise up to the ridder and flange ther bouks ther stoulles att him and…Mr. David Lindsy quho was sitting in the Kirk that caused ride itt was so stoned with the wifes and knocked that he was forsed to flie …otherways they head killed him.[2]

The Earl declared that "good religious" women participated—even violently—in riots and protests that dealt with topics related to their spiritual understandings and preferences, and he did not condemn them for those actions. Contrastingly, Mr. David

[1] Martyn Bennet, *Experiencing the Civil Wars in Ireland and Britain, 1638-1661* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

[2] As quoted in Bennet, 3.

Lindsy, the reader, is painted as a pitiful man at fault who is disciplined by a horde of righteously indignant "wifes."

While this episode is historically significant on several levels one of the most relevant features to highlight, for this study, is the relationship that it suggests existed between the women involved and their religion. The staunch, low-church, Calvinistic principals of Edinburgh's Scottish Presbyterian women did not permit the invasion of outside and foreign, which is what they understood to be English practices, upon their individual or communal faith. Also, key to understanding these women's hatred of the prayer book lies in an interpretation of what the book represented in terms of how such a text restricted spiritual exercises and curbed women's authority or altered their role within the church. [3]

The Presbyterian faith, like many other Protestant traditions, exemplified elements of egalitarianism which concerned some figures of authority, such as King Charles and his bishops. Historian Keith Thomas, explains that dissenting religious sects during the English Civil War exhibited many characteristics that were interpreted as anti-hierarchical or disruptive. The sects generally supported ideas of spiritual equality for all believers as well as the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They also wanted complete self-governance of their churches, and devalued the role of the ministry. Additionally, within the sects, women tended to outnumber men, which was a disturbing fact that did

[3]Sociologist and Anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, explained that religion exists as a cultural system that makes use of symbols. These symbols carry meaning which is reinforced through communal ritual. I proscribe to Geertz's theories and adhere to the idea that individual experience exists within a given society's worldview. Individual experience is not isolated, but occurs within a system of symbols that are easily recognized by other members. When I refer to symbols and meaning, I do so with Geertz's theories in mind. See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion ed. Michael Banton (Edinburgh, UK: Tavistock Publishers, 1966).

not go unnoticed.[4] When referring to the St. Giles riots, the Bishop of Stirling, Henry Guthrie, for instance, acknowledged that, "a multitude of wives and serving women in several churches rose…threw stools…at preachers…and strove to pull them from their pulpits."[5] Guthrie's account suggests that women from different social backgrounds, as members of the same faith, acted in unity within several different congregations to overthrow figures of authority—their conforming ministers. The women who participated in these events believed they had the authority to do so, because they believed that spiritually, women were equal to men before God. Women were equally capable of experiencing the authority of the Holy Spirit, as demonstrated in the context of revivals, communion services, and other religious activities. However, with the implementation of rigid and fixed forms of religious practice, represented by the *Common Book of Prayer*, women especially had the potential to be spiritually constricted. Women did not have access to religious authority via the same avenues as their male peers. They could not attend universities or be ordained; there was simply no means within a ridged system for them to have a voice. Elisabeth West of eighteenth-century Edinburgh explained this very clearly when, in her memoirs, she wrote against the book. She stated that, "Prelacy hath invented a new way of worshipping God by a set form of prayer, which they call, 'The book of common prayer.' Truly they have given it a right name, for it is but a common prayer indeed…" For Elisabeth, the idea of a book containing set prayers inhibited her spiritual exercise and experience while it negatively affected her relationship with God. She said, "it is not the book of spiritual prayers, so it

[4]Keith V. Thomas, "Women in the Civil War Sects," *Past & Present*, No. 13 (April, 1958), 44-45.
[5] As quoted in Bennett,3.

cannot be acceptable to God, who only must be worshipped in spirit and truth."[6] West believed in the effectual power of the Holy Spirit to speak to the faithful individually and, like many other Presbyterians, that formulaic worship hindered the workings of the spirit on a personal level. Subconsciously, she may also have understood that equal access to the blessings and experiences brought on by the Holy Spirit legitimized women's religious authority, the same authority seen in the stool riots of 1637. Women's equal positions as potential vessels of the Lord's Holy Spirit lent them an amount of credence in spiritual matters, and so, it is understandable why they would react so defensively when that source of religious authority was threatened.

The goal of this work then is to uncover some ways in which Presbyterian women wielded religious authority and to argue that this authority provided opportunities for the development of a public sense of self through their access to the Holy Spirit that is most readily recognizable in their role as memorists. Women who cultivated their piety by engaging in private religious duties like prayer, meditation, and scriptural study could establish a public sense of piety via ritual participation and the demonstration of doctrinal understanding which confirmed their communal membership. They did this during public ceremonies, especially communion services, but also during prayer groups and other religious activities. Moreover, this theory appears to be applicable to Scottish, Irish, and North American Presbyterian communities, although the best preserved documents created by Presbyterian women originate from the lowland cities of Scotland.

In order to establish this thesis an abridged history of the nature of evangelicalism within the Presbyterian Church from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century will be

[6]Elisabeth West, *Memoirs or, Spiritual Exercises of Elisabeth West: Written in her own Hand* (Newry, UK: D. Carpenter, 1787), 177.

discussed. Holy Fairs, centered upon the Lord's Supper, and the revivals that accompanied them, shaped the experiences of women within the Presbyterian tradition and are particularly significant.[7] Additionally, the personal experiences of three eighteenth-century Scottish women will be explored to demonstrate how they wielded authority which ultimately allowed them to obtain a limited amount of religious authority that was then communicated to their extended faith communities via publication. Finally, a few accounts written by men about Presbyterian women's participation in communion and revival services in North America during the eighteenth-century will follow. This section will simply suggest that Presbyterian women throughout the North Atlantic region had similar religious experiences and expectations.

To begin, I would like define what I mean by the terms *non-conforming*, *pietism*, *evangelicalism*, and *religious authority*. As stated above, for the purpose of this paper non-conforming refers to groups that do not subscribe to all aspects of worship, practice, and/or doctrine of the Anglican Church. Even within Scotland, where the Presbyterian Church was the official church, there were seemingly regional variations in practice and disagreements over church government, often initiated by the crown, which led to confrontations with the establishment. The Covenanters are one of the most notable groups. They placed emphasis on the covenant of the church with God and preferred the presbytery system of church government over hierarchal episcopacy.

Pietism and evangelicalism are closely linked. Pietism is an emphasis on personal spiritual exercise and morality. Pietism is also closely associated with Puritanism, also known as Congregationalism. Presbyterianism and English Puritanism are both derived

[7]Holy Fairs, the Lord's Supper, and sacramental occasions all pertain to the taking of communion.

from the same tradition of Calvinistic theology, and they share many doctrinal ideas and spiritual understandings. Finally, evangelicalism refers to a preference for spiritual emotionalism and emphasis on the ability of the Holy Spirit to engage with individuals. Evangelical groups place emotion and spiritual experiences above rigid religious practices. The revival and communion services which will be discussed in Part II are a good example of the evangelical elements found within certain Presbyterian traditions. The importance placed upon professed public conversion and spiritual, or emotional, experience is also associated with evangelicalism. Professing in public was particularly important because it encouraged women to develop a public self which was necessary for earning religious authority. Additionally, the term "religious authority" means that within their own religious communities women could acquire, by their public piety and reputation, a circumscribed amount of respect and consideration from their coreligionists and that this allowed for the creation of a public self that existed outside the familial and domestic spheres.

## Part II. Presbyterian Revivalism and Theology in the Early Modern British North Atlantic

Presbyterians are often overshadowed by their Congregationalist brethren in conversations about evangelicalism in the early modern period. Historians have focused upon the abundant resources of New England, particularly before the eighteenth century, when exploring subjects such as the rise of evangelicalism, revivalism, and the topics pertaining the events leading up to the Great Awakening. Thus, while many important and insightful studies exist for all manner of topics relating to Puritan spirituality, culture, and society, a wide disparity still lingers in regards to knowledge about other evangelically inclined groups like the Presbyterians. However, several scholars including Marilyn J. Westerkamp, Leigh Eric Schmidt, Barry Vann, Kimberly Bracken Long, and Michael J. Crawford have made great strides in uncovering the connectedness of Presbyterians to the rise of evangelicalism and events surrounding the Great Awakening in the British Isles and the North American Colonies.[8]

This group of historians and religious scholars has uncovered much about the history of the early Presbyterian faith and its evangelical nature. One of the most significant evangelical elements of the church is the Scottish tradition of the Holy Fair or

[8]Presbyterians and Congregationalists, sometimes known simply as Puritans, derive many of their defining characteristics such as a strong adherence to Reformed theology and pietism from a common tradition generically known as Puritanism. However, Congregationalism has its roots within the radical tradition of the Church of England while Presbyterianism is a Scottish denomination shaped primarily by John Knox and Scottish tradition. Though English Independents or Puritans often shared social and religious objectives with Presbyterians, they also deviated greatly in some practices, particularly those related to communion. English Puritans preferred to have communicants seated in pews and offer only closed communions while Presbyterians maintained that everyone should be welcomed to view the communion ceremony which should take place at the front of the church when it was taken inside. The two groups often found that their views on such subjects were too adverse for them to work together effectively. See Leight Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 33-34.

the taking of communion, also known as the Lord's Supper. Schmidt, a renowned historian of Religion in America, explains in his insightful study, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period*, that the eucharist was a source of ideological concern for, not only John Knox, but other reformers within the Scottish Church in the sixteenth-century. There is a mystical dimension imbedded within the act of communion that was difficult to align with the newly formed Protestant doctrine. The Scottish Church, along with other Protestant bodies, rejected the Catholic belief of transubstantiation, or the notion that the bread and wine during services physically transformed into the blood and body of Christ, along with the Lutheran understanding of consubstantiation.[9] Instead, Knox and his followers upheld John Calvin's view that Christ was present among believers through the influence of the Holy Spirit during communion. This circumstance provided the service with a supernatural aura.[10]

The sacramental occasion became an increasingly important aspect of Presbyterian religious, social, and communal life, especially in the Scottish lowlands, for several reasons. In many ways Protestantism curbed the communal nature of Christianity and religious practice. No longer were priests venerated as the mouth pieces of God, but ordinary people were joined together in a universal priesthood. Men, women, and children alike were expected to read and understand scripture while working out their own salvation. Devotions became even more private and familial rather than communal

[9] Consubstantiation holds that the presence of Christ co-exists with the bread and wine, that it is that the elements of communion are bread and body, wine and blood. This belief is heretical to Catholics as well as most Protestants.

[10] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14-15

or centered upon the mass and the cathedral. Although ministers with their churches and sermons were acknowledged as teachers, and held instructional value, they were no longer more sacred then the lay believer.[11] However, in Scotland by the early seventeenth-century, Presbyterians had built an inherently communal sacramental occasion around their understandings of communion and the eucharist in order to "recreate a purely biblical and apostolic feast," the Holy Fair.[12] The fairs enabled Presbyterians—who for centuries before the Reformation had observed Catholic holy days, celebrations, and traditions that signified their belonging to a religious community—to recreate a ritualistic practice couched in Protestant language and symbols which allowed them to come together as a united body of believers. Moreover, those fairs presented many opportunities for the manifestation of evangelical activities.[13]

The Holy Fairs were perfect settings for religious fervor and emotional religion. They often pulled together members from several nearby kirk-parishes with participants ranging in numbers from seven-hundred to over a thousand. Sacramental occasions typically took place outside, lasted for three or more days, and were accompanied by fasts and sermons centered upon repentance and salvation.[14] These events drew the greater Presbyterian community together and consolidated their communal identities. Communicants were served at tables placed behind symbolic fencing that separated the saved from the unrepentant. Participants who were considered part of the religious body

[11]Ibid, 19.
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid.
[14] Barry Vann, "Presbyterian Social Ties and Mobility in the Irish Sea Culture Area, 1610-1690," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (September 2005), 237.

needed to provide tokens in order for them to gain admission to the tables.[15] Without those tokens, which represented a participant's belonging to the body of believers, there could be no partaking in the religious and communal ritual. To belong to the community of believers a person had to obtain a publically recognized reputation for doctrinal conformity, piety, and access to the Holy Spirit who moved true believers to repent and value salvation.

Moreover, a sense of urgency permeated the gatherings. Emphasis on religious experience and the Holy Spirit coupled with the force of sermons meant to activate spiritual renewal and conversion produced emotionally charged settings. One Presbyterian minister, Andrew Stewart, who officiated over a Scots-Irish sacramental occasion in Ulster during 1625, a century before the famous revivals of Johnathan Edwards' congregation in New England, recorded that:

> I have seen them myself stricken, and swoon with the Word—yea, a dozen in one day carried out of doors as dead, so marvellous was the power of the God smiting their hearts for sin, condemning and killing; and some of those were none of the weaker sex or spirit, but indeed some of the boldest spirits…the stubborn, who sinned and gloried in it, because they feared not man, are now patterns of sobriety, fearing to sin because they fear God; and this spread throughout the country to admiration in a manner, as many as came to hear the word of God, went away slain with the words of his mouth…[16]

This excerpt is one of the earliest recordings of the Presbyterian rivals. It clearly displays the heightened sense of emotion that occurred in Ulster surrounding the event. Stewart as well as his more well-known fellow minister, Robert Blair, had migrated from Scotland

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[15]Tokens were devised by John Calvin to maintain the purity of communion. Tokens, which resemble little metal stamps, were given to those members of the church community who demonstrated adroit knowledge of doctrine and were publically known for their piety. See Mary McWhorton, *Communion Tokens: Their Origins, History, and Use* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1936).

[16]As quoted in Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15.

to Ulster in order to serve the Presbyterian immigrants who had relocated to the Irish province during the years of the plantation. They carried on the tradition of the Holy Fair or communion revival. The beginnings of these revivals in Ulster were rumored to have originated within the congregation of an Antrim minister, James Glendinning who "fell upon a thundering way of preaching and exceedingly terrified his hearers."[17] Stewart, Blair, and other ministers were unimpressed with Glendinning's education and execution, but they worked together to foster the revivals that he had enacted.[18]

The Holy Fairs, with their proven potential for emotional experiences, migrated from Scotland to Ireland and eventually America, as scholars of American religion, such as Marilyn J. Westerkamp and Schmidt, especially, have demonstrated. This circumstance created a transatlantic network of Presbyterian communities that maintained a shared identity. Ministers within the Presbyterian church, because of the emphasis placed upon doctrine and education, were trained at Scottish universities—until such establishments as the Log College of William Tennant in the colonies gained an accepted reputation—and then sent out among the Presbyterian communities scattered across northern Ireland, and the colonies. Though the churches were influenced by new landscapes and challenges, they were able to maintain some cohesion and shared understandings of culture. A constant influx of new migrants from Scotland and Ireland to North American also reinforced those connections across the Atlantic.

The transatlantic religious community of Presbyterians held several defining characteristics. Members of the faith had ancestral roots in Scotland, often by way of Ireland. Additionally, any history of the early Presbyterian Church will note the

[17]Ibid, 24.
[18]Ibid.

distinctive sense of persecution which many adherents felt. In Scotland those who, during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, refused to accept the *Book of Common Prayer,* or other proscribed methods of worship handed down from the Anglican establishment, faced repression. Presbyterians suffered under the weight of Black Oaths and the paying of tithes to the established Church of Ireland.[19] At times non-conforming ministers would be persecuted and stripped of their livelihoods in Scotland as well as Ireland. Presbyterians perceived that they suffered under the reign of the Stewarts after 1603, particularly. Presbyterian Church government was more unilateral and democratic than that of the Anglican Church which acknowledged an established hierarchy with the king held as the head of the church. Thus, Presbyterians were often rightly associated with republicanism and radicalism.

One characteristic that appears to have disturbed figures of authority was the attraction women felt for the faith and how men within their communities granted their female co-religionists considerable liberty in both religious and social engagements. While some ministers seemed to tolerate and even encourage participation of women during public religious activities, conforming ministers typically did not. The Anglican Bishop of Down and Connor, Henry Leslie, deplored the communion ceremonies of the Scottish settlers in Ireland. The nature of the ceremonies and revivals did not in any way conform to the formality of the Church of Ireland. They were often held outdoors; they were emotional, and they showed a marked disregard for gender or social hierarchy. Bishop Leslie condemned the dissenters for their "use of women to advance their

[19]The Black Oath was an oath of loyalty to the Anglican Church that was required of Ulster residents beyond the age of sixteen.

faction."[20] He further asserted that women enjoyed their place within dissenting Presbyterian communities and under dissenting ministers because "they love knowledge and desire liberty" in ways that they should not have.[21] Bishop Leslie and his contemporaries, Archbishop William Laud, and Sir Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford and Lord Deputy of Ireland—after the ascension of Charles I—eroded the toleration of dissenting ministers in Ireland by persecution and removal from posts.[22]

From 1631-1640, Wentworth, carried out Charles' initiatives in Ireland and he was not a popular man. Nearly every sector of Irish society had reason to despise the Lord Deputy. He stripped the Catholic Old English of their last vestiges of political influence, and he imposed religious policies upon the dissenting populations throughout Ireland, attempting to force religious conformity. The Thirty-Nine Articles of 1634 and what would be termed the "Black Oath" were particularly loathed by the Presbyterians in the north of Ireland. The Oath required a pledge of loyalty and obedience to the Church of Ireland. Most dissenting ministers would not take the oath, and thus, they fled to Scotland, becoming involved in religious-political developments there. Men, however, were not alone in suffering persecution or instigating resistance.[23]

Ministers were not the only ones harassed by Wentworth and his reforms. The 1630s in Ireland saw many Presbyterian women targeted by the Wentworth administration. In fact, Mary O'Dowd, one of Ireland's leading historians of gender, states that Presbyterian women were especially persecuted, making up the majority of

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[20]As quoted in Phil Kilroy, "Women and the Reformation," in *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 180

[21] Ibid.

[22] Westerkamp, 16.

[23]Thomas Barlett, "Politics and Society, 1600-1800," in *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30.

female persecutions, for their objection to the "Black Oath," which was required by all men and women aged sixteen and older by 1639. Furthermore, wives of dissenting ministers seemed particularly vulnerable.[24] When the minister, Robert Cunningham of Holywood, died in 1637, his estate was seized and his widow did not receive anything.[25] Wives also suffered when their husbands were cast from the church such as the spouses of ministers Robert Blair, George Dunbar, Josias Welsh, John Livingston, John Ridge, James Hamilton, and Samuel Row.[26] Not only did these depositions cause financial hardship for the families of the ministers, but they also usually required the families to retreat to Scotland where they would be protected by the Scottish Church, leaving in their wake disrupted and leaderless communities. Many of the ministers such as Blair and Cunningham became involved in the conflicts arising in Scotland upon their return. The lay-leaders within the congregations they left behind, meanwhile, took on the responsibility of continuing dissenting religious practices.[27] Therefore, ties between the Presbyterian communities within Ulster and Scotland were kept unbroken because of the work of lay-men and women. Historian and sociologist, Barry Vann's research has determined that ministers in Ulster, before their deposition, stressed the idea of an extended church community that provided an identity for dissenters to attach to religious practice. Then individual churches within Ireland were viewed by their members as parts

[24]Women helped to preserve religious traditions while their ministers suffered persecution in many ways. They opened their home to itinerant ministers and maintained secret prayer groups and other religious activities. See Mary O'Dowd, *A History of Women in Ireland, 1500-1800* (New York: Pearson & Longman, 2005), 172-173.

[25]Westerkamp,36

[26]Ibid.

[27]Vann, 243.

of a larger church community which included congregations in Scotland and North America.[28]

Thus, regardless of location, Presbyterian communities carried on traditions and practices despite perceived and actual persecution or intolerance, including their Holy Fairs. Ministers and laymen within the faith, on both sides of the Atlantic, encouraged and defended women's spiritual experiences and exercises. They appear, whether in Scotland, Ireland, or North American, to acknowledge that pious, spirit-filled women held a certain amount of religious authority granted to them by their access to the Holy Spirit of God. In the following section a closer look will be made into the spiritual memoirs of three Scottish women whose lives and experiences are validated by men within their communities during their lifetimes and presented as examples to later generations through the publication of their writings.

[28]Ibid, 238.

## Part III. Spiritual Exercises: Authority and Writing

Not all Presbyterian women wielded their authority as Jenet Geddes did her stool. The memoirs of Elizabeth Cairns, Elisabeth West, and Mary Somervel are significant sources for inquiry into the ways in which Presbyterian women could exercise religious authority and cultivate a public sense of self in a more ordinary manner. Their memoirs provide examples of female piety that were understood, accepted, and placed before other believers as righteous examples via publication. In many ways the women seem extraordinary. They did not marry, they provided for themselves by engaging in domestic and service positons, and finally, their internal thoughts and spiritual journeys were published making them public figures.

While the women were exceptional in some ways their attachment to and regular attendance at sacramental occasions were held in common with their fellow believers. As individuals they understood the same symbols and participated in the same rituals that reinforced how they navigated their everyday lives as a social group. Schmidt eloquently states that the sacramental fairs and the revivals that accompanied the occasions were not one time experiences concerned only with conversion, "but part of a circle, spiraling upwards, that all of God's people wound their way around again and again."[29] The services were an integral and rhythmic part of the women's social and spiritual lives that informed their identities and bolstered their religious authority and confidence by reiterating the meaning behind the symbolism of ritual. The act of communion was an act of affirmation regarding their places, not only among God's people, but within God's heart. As historian Michael J. Crawford asserts, evangelicals believed in the importance

[29]Schmidt, 158.

of emotion in religion and that religion was foundationally about the heart of the believer.[30]

The language and symbolism imbedded within the Presbyterian communion services was suited particularly well to female believers in this regard. Historians Kimberly Bracken Long and Schmidt have both indicated that Presbyterian ministers relied heavily upon the imagery and language found in the Song of Songs; imagery that evokes a romantic relationship. Ministers often spoke of Christ as a bridegroom or a husband to the church and believer. In a symbolic sense, communion was a wedding. Schmidt argues, based upon his research in Scottish revival narratives, that "though ministers spoke of nuptial intimacy with Christ as a relationship available to men…more women than men ended up experiencing their relationship in such terms."[31] This seemed to be the case for Cairns, West, and Somervel. All three women in their memoirs provided written covenants between themselves and their Lord that read like marriage vows. For example, West specifically referred to the Lord as "my husband" in one of her many covenants.[32] The lives of these three women were saturated in the symbolic language and imagery of the Scottish communion occasions and their spiritual experiences reflected, and were informed by those religious understandings. They were beloved and chosen brides of an almighty God who enlightened and empowered them through their communion with his Holy Spirit. The access to God, that the women understood themselves to have through the Holy Spirit, imbued them with religious

[30]Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York: Oxford University Press,1991), 86.

[31]Schmidt, 164.

[32]West, 29.

authority, and they wielded that authority in many different ways, and passing along their experiences and advice through writing was one of the most important.[33]

The three women examined below were all from the lowland regions of Scotland and were born toward the end of the seventeenth century, though they lived well into the eighteenth. Each woman began her written account by describing how she was drawn to the gospel at an early age, became burdened by the knowledge of her own unworthiness and depravity, doubted her salvation, and finally, by means of various spiritual exercises, came to accept that she was affected by the Holy Spirit and part of Christ's elect portion. This pattern of interest in religion, acknowledgement of complete depravity, and the inability of one to trigger her own salvation, along with the hope in grace freely given by Christ is typical of Protestant salvation narratives, thus in that regard the stories are not peculiar, but they exemplify common patterns and themes within evangelical conversion stories. However, examining some of these themes and how the Holy Spirit and sacramental occasions informed their experiences within the religious community will provide for a greater sense of how the women perceived themselves.

Historian Catherine Kerrison, explains in her work, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South*, that writing posed a significant opportunity for early modern women. As authors women could preserve and pass on their experiences and knowledge, and making the effort to do so proved that they believed themselves to be valuable subjects. Evangelicalism also created unique avenues

[33]Interestingly, Protestant denominations tend to refer to God as Father. However, in the case of Scottish Communion services, Presbyterians dwell on the idea of God as husband and while the three women under discussion refer to God as father from time to time, they seem particularly keen on the idea of God as husband. See Keith V. Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," *Past & Present*, No. 13 (April 1958), 43.

for female expression particularly for women who were not members of the established elite and did not necessarily have access to a voice outside of their faith communities. Cairns, West, and Somervel were servants for most of their lives. Their attachment to an evangelical tradition allowed them access to the "subversive potential evangelical Christianity afforded for female spiritual autonomy."[34] Furthermore, the importance placed upon feeling and emotion during conversion within evangelical groups legitimated female religious experience through a medium they could access.[35] Women could not obtain religious authority via traditional channels such as ordination, but with the rise of evangelicalism, they could establish that authority through their emotional connection to their faith.

The recognition of their feelings as legitimate and significant religious exercise encouraged women to record and analyze their spiritual journeys which in turn fostered a sense of self for women. Writing down their emotional experiences—an action often times encouraged by men in their communities—allowed women, as Kerrison suggests, to "scrutinize their experiences of God, they examined themselves as the objects of the love and attention of the divine, and they began to see themselves as subject."[36] Writing was an act of self-expression and women who wrote as well as the men who encouraged them, believed that the lives of the women were worthy subjects of study. Choosing to write down one's experiences expressed an understanding of one's authority on a given subject.[37] This sense of authority, or the worthiness of their experiences and advice, can

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[34]Cathrine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 74.

[35]Kerrison, 80.

[36]Kerrison, 95.

[37]Kerrison, 95.

be found in the writings of all three women. For instance, the unnamed prefacer of Somervel's memoir stated that she urged her nephew to "publish it after her death; for she had promised to the Lord to show forth his wonderful love and condescension to her, for the glory of his name, and the encouragement of his people."[38] Somervel believed that her writings held value for her fellow believers and that they would bring glory to God. Her experiences were worth consideration.

The memoirs were intended for the edification of the reader. All three women with their words, experiences, understandings, and actions exhort virtue and set forth examples of godliness while also baring their souls and troubles in a way that connects them with believers of their own times and beyond. Additionally, the topics or experiences that they chose to record speaks to the areas of spiritual life in which they felt most secure or empowered. In that way, their memoirs serve to preserve their guidance and righteous authority for their fellow believers. Somervel's memoir, the briefest of the three narratives, centers heavily upon prayer and trusting the sovereignty of God. There are many occasions when Somervel was troubled and found relief in prayer and devotions wherein she experienced the "sweet fellowship and communion…with the Father and with his Son."[39] Sometimes she would spend several hours in prayer and meditation and her narrative encouraged others to heed her example.

Prayer was a tool, a religious exercise that held great power because she believed in a sovereign Lord. Prayer was a ritual with strong meaning, in that it provided the participant with access to an omnipotent being that could influence the world around

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[38]Ibid.

[39]Mary Somervel, *Clear and Remarkable Display of the Condescension, Love, and Faithfulness of God, in the Spiritual Exerperiences of Mary Somervel* (Paisley, UK: J. Neilson, Caldwell Bookseller, 1789), 11.

them. Somervel did not use her power of prayer for herself only, but she also called upon it in times of communal crisis. In 1723 a small-pox epidemic struck her town and Somervel remembered feeling anxious over some of the children. She prayed for them earnestly and recalled that she experienced great relief from prayer as well as hopeful responses from the Lord, probably in the form of recovery from illness in the case of some of the children.[40] The act of prayer gave her power and security in a troubling time, and it was a ritual that her fellow believers understood and appreciated. More astonishing is Somervel's account of experiencing a small miracle. While being trapped in the kirkyard one night after she had retired there for personal prayer, she found that the gate of the yard was locked as were all other exits. After some time in prayer, Somervel discovered that the gate had been unlocked by what she could only believe was the hand of God.[41] Somervel experienced prayer as a form of power. Prayer gave her some semblance of control over the world around her. In writing about her experiences with prayer, and the beneficial effects of those prayers on herself and her community, Somervel also demonstrated how prayer should be approached as an authority on the subject. Although her narrative is short, and at times hard to follow, the example she set was one that her contemporaries could understand and emulate.

Cairn's narrative is equally instructive and more unusual. Her early life is reminiscent of stories about Medieval Christian mystics. As a young girl she spent most her time alone among the pastures of rural Scotland with her flock of sheep. There, in the bleak wilderness, she thought about God, salvation, Hell, and had visions. Even her baptism reads like that of an early saint; she explained that during the time of her birth in

[40]Ibid, 19.
[41]Ibid, 26.

1685, the true ministers were being persecuted. Cairns' parents, wanting their daughter to be baptized by one of the Lord's ministers, "to the Hazard of their own lives," found a "Faithful minister of Christ" and had the baby girl baptized under the cover of night.[42] The act of baptism is a power symbol; it separates the clean from the unclean and represents new life in Christ. Cairns, in using this episode as an introduction to her memoir, established an identity for herself that is discernable throughout her narrative. She was special, unusual, a prophet like figure who had visions, and a close mystical relationship with the Lord.

Moreover, she was gifted with such powers at a young age. Cairns fell among some rocks around the age of five while tending the sheep. Realizing she could have died, the girl began to think about hell and had her first recorded vision, "I had dreamed, that I saw Folk going by, and one of them told me that they were in Hell, and that it was a dreadful place. I asked, what made it so, and one answered me, that the wrath of God was there.[43] Cairns felt that she was blessed with religious manifestations and experiences from the earliest parts of life. She informed her readers that by the age of eight she could take no pleasure in children's play. Instead, she thought on the sober duties of religion, unlike the other children, which further established her peculiarities.

Cairns's background also helped to foster the image she had of herself. She must have absorbed most of her early instruction from visits to the kirk and relatives because she was not taught to read until her eighth year. Rather than being taught religion from the Bible, she learned from the Spirit of God, which she often refers to as *The Light*. This

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[42]Elizabeth Cairns, *Memoirs of the Life of Elizabeth Cairns, Written By herself some Years before her Death* (Glasgow, UK: John Greig, 1960), 1.

[43] Ibid, 4.

light in her soul made Cairns aware of her own depravity and the truth of "God, a Saviour, and Heaven."[44] Once she was able to read, Cairns wrote, "I observe that what I was taught by this Light, was conform to the Scriptures, although at that Time I was not learned to read."[45] Thus, Cairns' personality was influenced early on by her isolation, interest in the supernatural, and visions she believed she experienced. Religion for her, at least as a youth, was solitary rather than communal, and she claimed later in life that she preferred solitude to the company of people. The woman established an identity for herself within her memoir that was independent and powerful. She was a woman of God who needed no mortal teacher though she chose to teach other indirectly through her writing..

Cairns would always lean on her own understanding and not rely heavily on the instruction of others. She earnestly believed that the spirit of God could instruct her better than anyone else as she stated herself that, "I was there by in some Degree taught all the Lessons necessary for my Salvation, without the Benefit of Man's teaching."[46] Cairns, in many ways, was a mystic. She claimed that identity for herself in her writings. The Lord equipped her with visions and he taught her through his own spirit. Her authority came directed from the Lord, not man.

Likewise, Elizabeth West established an identity built upon her relationship with the Lord and his Holy Spirit. She was perhaps the most educated as well as urbane of the three women. West informed her reader at the beginning of her narrative that she was provided a very good education by her mother and aunt indicating several generations of

[44]Ibid, 5.
[45]Ibid, 6.
[46]Ibid, 14.

educated women within her family.[47] She was born and lived in Edinburgh her entire life. However, West attended sacramental occasions in many of the surrounding parishes and appears to have led a rather independent life. An active member of her congregation, West communicated personally with her ministers and spent a significant amount of time with other parishioners in private prayer meetings. The memoirs that West left behind plainly describe the life of a woman who was well established and respected within her religious community.[48]

Like Somervel and Cairns, West recalled that she was drawn to religion very early in life. She conceded that, "Tho I cannot tell the time and place, when and where, the Lord did me first good; yet this I know, that he began with me early, when I was young in years, to incline my heart to seek the Lord."[49] West, like Cairns, sets a precedent early on in her narrative—the Lord singled her out and called her to his service. Not only was she inclined to seek out the Lord early in life, but she began to record her spiritual journey as a young girl. She did so on the advice of a minister whom she seemed to have retained a close and confidential connection with throughout her young life. West respected and supported not only her own minister, but other local ministers also. The parishes, when engaging in the Lord's Supper, would call on the surrounding ministers to help in the ordinance, and this circumstance allowed the congregants to become acquainted with many local ministers. Beyond West's devotion to writing, her ministers, and other religious affairs, she was an ardent nationalist. Her memoirs demonstrate an

[47]West demonstrates her intelligence throughout her memoirs and she mentions studying sophisticated words on religion. On page 16 she informs us that "I read Francis Spira. I had several other books I read, concerning the being of God, but could get light from none…till one day I was reading…John Bunyen."

[48]Elisabeth West, *Memoirs, or, Spiritual Exercises of Elisabeth West: Written by her own Hand* (Newry , UK: D. Carpenter, 1787), 4.

[49]Ibid, 1-3.

understanding of national politics and religion as well as a pronounced and critical stance and theory regarding church government, one that closely adhered to those of John Calvin.

As mentioned above, West was encouraged by male religious authority figures as a girl to write about her spiritual life. She sought counsel from these members on a regular basis and they appeared to take her concerns seriously. West wrote that, "I several times resorted to Mr. Meldrum, and told him my case…his converse to me was both meek and comfortable, but particularly, he exhorted me to keep a record of all the Lord's dealing with me soul.[50] The advice was seconded by another minister, Mr. Flint, whom she was close to, and West set herself to the task. Unlike Cairns, West was a social person. She sought guidance from religious figures, and was an active member of her parish. She allowed herself to be guided by ministers whom she trusted. It seems that Flint and Meldrum were both ministers that West encountered as a teenager, but West's early minister was Mr. James Kirkton.

Kirkton influenced West considerably in her youth. Her description of Kirkton from 1694 invokes that of modern day evangelical leaders. Kirkton preached sermons that were "good for the memory" and he "besought us earnestly with tears, that we should choose presently whom we would serve…"[51] The minister's emotional response to religion and preaching made it accessible even to a young girl. Kirkton's methods were incredibly affective. West wrote that, "He protested, he would not go out of the pulpit till we should give our consent presently to bargain without delay. If I right remember, this

[50]Ibid, 6.
[51]Ibid, 4.

was the first time that ever I could observe the Lord speaking to me in public."[52] The Lord spoke to West via the emotional discourse of Kirkton. Emotion was a language she understood and connected to. West was shaped and nourished by the evangelical nature of her ministers, especially Kirkton. She claimed that, "…He not only preached to us on the sufferings of Christ, of which I had never heard the like before (for I thought every sentence was a wonder and was backed with the power of God) but he made offers of that Christ to all that would receive him; that was the blessedest news that ever I heard."[53] This statement of West's not only highlights the esteem she held for her minister, but it demonstrates the zeal she would always possess for communal religion.

West took Christ into her heart in a fashion that was particularly evangelical and communal. The day after hearing Kirkton speak so forcibly, West recorded that "I have this day taken the sacrament, and sworn myself to be the Lord's at the table."[54] Taking part in the sacrament solidified her place among the Lord's people. It was symbol of her belonging. West also recalls that she was commended by "those among whom I conversed" and "gained a great deal of applause" because she could remember the ministers' sermons and discuss them.[55] This demonstrates that very early in her life she grew comfortable having conversations dealing with religious matters and that she enjoyed encouragement from her evangelical community for her vocalization. Her identity was communal, she belonged to a body of believers who accepted her and valued her insight on spiritual matters and her participation in the sacrament was an important symbol of her acceptance.

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[52]Ibid.
[53]Ibid, 4.
[54]Ibid, 7.
[55]Ibid,5-6.

West derived her spiritual authority from the public acknowledgment of her piety and belonging. Religious authority came naturally for her and she took her vows to the Lord, those made in secret and at ordnances, seriously. She noted in several places that she would rebuke her peers saying things such as "When I had been with my comrades, if they had been complaining, I wondered at them, and would chide them; what can ail you to complain that have heard of Christ? Are ye ignorant…"[56] West believed that she had the religious authority to reprimand fellow believers who were in error. Later in her narrative she would concede that she was being boastful in correcting her friends, once she had dealt with a few spiritual struggles herself, but nonetheless, when reprimanding other believers, she acted with authority.

West wielded her authority not only among peers, but family as well. Particularly, she took umbrage with her father's neglect of familial religious practice, concluding that her family was disregarding their religious duties. Seeking to correct this, West addressed her "parent of his sin, in not setting up the worship of God in his family..." she desired "him to do it."[57] She undercut the traditional role of the father as head of the religious household because he was not, in her opinion, fulfilling his spiritual obligations. It appears that, since West was never successful in reforming the ways of her father, she sought her spiritual needs from outside the home and grew deep roots within the religious community. As noted before, she attended sacramental occasions in several parishes and even did so on occasion against the wishes of her family, further demonstrating her independence and conviction regarding her religious duties. One such occurrence took place when the sacrament was being held at Preston-Pans, when West

[56]Ibid, 8.
[57]Ibid, 27.

had been ill and her family wished for her to remain home. West wrote that she "gave a deaf ear to them all, and away I came to Preston-pans…"[58] In this instance, "female piety" was working to "undergird female resistance" and West effectively used her religious zeal to undercut the obligation to obey the wishes of her family.[59]

Sacraments like the ones West attended so frequently were a significant part of Presbyterian social life, but they also held meaning for the individual's spiritual life as well. West specifically refers to her covenant with the Lord during sacramental occasions as a marriage. Referring to the Lord in one of her many covenants—she renewed her vows often—West a used terms such as "my husband and Lord" as well as "Christ, Prophet, Priest and King."[60] Her relationship with the Lord was all-encompassing. The relationship she had with her Lord provided her with authority and confidence in her intuition and understanding which she believed were guided by the spirit of God.

Finally, West used her union with the Lord and her experiences with the Holy Spirit to plead for her nation and support her church. She hoped that "the Lord would continue his gospel in Scotland for ever…that he would abide with his servants the ministers…make the gospel thrive under their hand's…pardon the sins of the nation."[61] West saw her evangelical ministers as the defenders and deliverers of the gospel to the people of Scotland. She was so attached to Mr. Meldrum that she "went always to the Trone-kirk, and would not go to the College-kirk…Every body was angry with me, why I did not keep my parish-kirk; but nothing would prevail with me to leave Mr. Meldrum,

[58]Ibid, 45.
[59]Kerrison, 74.
[60]Ibid, 29.
[61]Ibid.

till at last there was a word borne upon me."[62] West truly had faith in the ministers she was familiar with and showed them great support. She also found spiritual support from private prayer with other ladies within the community.

Once such unnamed woman, whom West speaks of with the utmost respect, informed her that she "was going to desert the ordinances" as well as the ministers because of their many faults. West wrote that, "She told me, that she thought it was neither her duty, nor the duty of any of the Lord's people, to own them for ministers."[63] The woman was a member of some non-conformist group who met on their own. West actually attended a meeting and conversed with the people gathered there and she decided upon reflection that the Lord's "holy Spirit" still impressed upon her the importance of the ministers and ordinances.[64] She kept in touch with the woman and continued their prayer meetings, but she never wavered in her loyalty to the Presbyterian ministers.

Fealty to her ministers and faith brought West into the world of politics which was deeply interconnected with the church during her lifetime. West kept up with national and political developments. She made note of the Glorious Revolution during the attendance of her first sacrament in 1694 as well as the death of the King William who she referred to "a King endued with all manner of wit and prudence for government of his kingdoms" who delivered them from "the tyranny of Popery and Prelacy, two unsupportable burdens Scotland had long been under" though she held special abhorrence of Prelacy.[65] She was opinionated about the dangers facing Presbyterian ministers and church government within Scotland. She concluded in one section that, "Presbyterians

[62]Ibid, 25.
[63]Ibid, 68.
[64]Ibid, 69-70.
[65]Ibid, 102.

will never agree with Prelacy," an opinion held by may lowland Scots because "they have invented a new head to the church; they will have the king to be head of the church; so that whatever he commands, must be obeyed, under pain of rebellion."[66] This was troubling for West because she thought that, "The king may invent new laws in the church when he pleases, though they be contrary to God's command."[67] West became a Scottish patriot in defense of her religious liberties.

West, like the theological founder of her faith John Calvin, obviously held a conviction that government and religion were meant to work together. The point of government was to promote true religion. Bad rulers could be forms of divine punishment, but that did not mean they could not be removed. Kings and governments were subject to the Lord and therefore the church. However, when the king became the head of the church, he was too powerful. West vehemently wrote against the Anglican prayer book, bishops, and the king as head of the church, and championed the more egalitarian and evangelical Presbyterian preferences of governance and worship. It is extraordinary that a woman's words regarding such matters could garner the approval of men during the time period, but as we will discuss in the concluding section, men within the Presbyterian community were often very supportive of their female co-religionists.

[66]Ibid, 175.
[67]Ibid.

## Part IV: Conclusions

The spiritual journals of Somervel, Cairns, and West demonstrate that men within their religious communities acknowledged, defended, and essentially legitimated the women's experiences, and therefore their authority, in spiritual matters. West was personally urged by ministers of her acquaintance to record her experiences, and all three women were given stamps of approval by their prefacers. Publishing the women's thoughts, understandings, and experiences ultimately provided them with a platform from which they could advise and instruct fellow Christians, and the men who published the narratives defended the women's experiences and virtue as well as their authority.

The men who introduced the women's narratives focused on their piety and virtues. The unnamed prefacer of Somervel's narrative explains that "she was taught of God from her very youth, and seemed remarkably to grow in the Spiritual life as she advanced in years" and that "she obtained such ravishing foretastes of the heavenly happiness as often overpowered her frail, mortal body…"[68] Somervel was presented as a virtuous and humble person who suffered both bodily afflictions and persecution because of her parent's "strict adheres to the covenanted work of the reformation."[69] Not only was she a survivor of trials, but because of her faith in the midst of those trials, she was greatly rewarded with "near access…to her Maker" and allowed many "intimations of God's favour" which "was better to her than life."[70] The preface writer recognized Somervel's actions and experiences as evidence of her personal piety. She was a woman who sought the favor of her Lord and experienced great returns for her faith, thus, Somervel's

[68] Somervel, iii-iv.
[69] Somervel, iii.
[70] Somervel, iii.

narrative was valuable for instruction, and her example was one that should be emulated, in his opinion.

Likewise, West's and Cairns' prefacers made similar claims for their virtue and the value of their writings. West was proclaimed a "pious and devout Christian" who "needs not a letter of recommendation from any."[71] Moreover, "the holy Spirit of truth dwelt in her heart; and God sometimes indeed made the light of his countenance to shine upon her."[72] Statements such as these supplied support for West's piety and virtue. While John Greig, the prefacer for Cairns' narrative, assured the reader that she was blessed with "Discoveries of the Glory and love of Christ" and that she was "more than ordinary sensible of Manifestations of the Mystery of election and redeeming Love and Grace, as display'd in the new Covenant."[73] He declared that Cairns was "always grave, sober and modest, yet zealous for the Cause and Testimony of Jesus" as were West and Somervel.[74] All three women were presented as good Christians and good subjects who possessed the appropriate virtues. They were grave and sober followers of the Lord, not silly women prone to simple hysterics.

Furthermore, all three men defended the women from accusations of enthusiasm which were prevalent during the time of their publication. The unknown prefacer of Somervel's narrative, in a footnote addressing the rewards of her prayer, stated that, "these returns of prayer may be obnoxious to the cavils of modern professors…But let these take care how they condemn what they do not understand." Emotionalism and occurrences that appeared miraculous were not always viewed as legitimate religious

[71] West, 1.
[72] Cairns, 3.
[73] Cairns, 6.
[74] Cairns, 4.

experiences. West's prefacer also asked in his introduction, "Can any, who seriously read these papers, say, that it is all delusion and enthusiastic fancy?"[75] Religious establishments, such as the Anglican Church often attacked evangelicalism within dissenting denominations as outright enthusiasm. Religious Scholar Ann Taves, explains that enthusiasm was "defined as illegitimacy in relation to false inspiration or, more broadly, false experience."[76] Women like Cairns, West, and Somervel, who observed orthodox doctrine, and were unquestionably orthodox Christians, were not challenged on ecclesiological or doctrinal grounds, but rather their revelation or access to God was called into question.[77] The men who introduced their narratives, and thus, defended their experiences, contributed to challenges regarding fundamental social ideas of authority. Women were an important part of the church-body, and they possessed instructional value, giving them the authority to participate in spiritual matters whether it took the form of writing about their experiences or taking part in revivals.[78]

The men and women who proscribed to an evangelical faith, a faith that embraced emotionalism, and believed in the effective power of the Holy Spirit, recognized the spiritual equality that existed between them. Revivals, whether they were in Scotland, Ulster, or the colonies, reflected a shared understanding of this. Up until now, this paper has focused primarily on Scotland and Ulster, but a cursory glance at several documents from the colonies will show that it is entirely likely that Presbyterian women in the colonies engaged with their congregations in similar ways. Documents from the middle

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[75] West, 1.

[76] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17.

[77] Taves, 17-18.

[78] Taves, 18.

and southern colonies, where many Scots-Irish immigrants settled, demonstrate that women were still active participants in revivals, although their environments had changed.

Samuel Blair, an evangelically minded minister writing in 1744, about a revival within his Pennsylvanian congregation four years earlier, discussed the experience of young woman. He concluded that she lacked a heartfelt response to the gospel, although she was knowledgeable of doctrine, and she herself felt that she was not "altogether without Christ."[79] The lady asked about going to a private meeting of some church members who engaged in "Reading, Prayer and religious Conference" much like those meetings attended by the Scottish women in their memoirs.[80] While attending the meeting the woman was struck deaf and blind, and remained so until she attended the sacrament where "her Soul conceived strong Hopes of Reconciliation with God."[81] Both male and female congregants of Blair's church, at that time of revival, experienced emotional and heartfelt responses to the gospel, including bouts of weeping and fainting that were similar to Andrew Stewart's descriptions of the Ulster revivals of 1625. The revivals and communion ceremonies in the southern colonies were described much the same way as Blair's and Stewart's. An Anglican priest, Charles Woodmason, recorded his thoughts of the South Carolina backcountry in a private journal. Woodmason appeared unimpressed by the religiosity of the Scots-Irish settlers who, he believed, did not conform to any real religious practice. He claimed that "They complained of being eaten up by Itinerant Teachers, Preachers, and Imposters from New

[79]Ibid, 82.

[80]Samuel Blair, "A Short and Faithful Narrative," in Thomas S. Kidd, ed. *The Great Awakening: A Brief History in Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 81.

[81]Ibid.

England and Pennsylvania" which resulted in a complicated configuration of "Baptists, New Lights, Presbyterians, Independents, and an hundred other sects."[82] Civil administration also suffered in that "we are without Law, or Order" because "all the Magistrates are Presbyterian."[83] Woodmason, being a loyalist Anglican minister, writing on the cusp of the American Revolution, aligned the Presbyterians with Republican sentiment and probably found them threatening. They did not appear to think much of him either believing him to possess "Popish Designs" and to be a "Romish Priest in disguise."[84] Of course, at the time that Woodmason was in the backcountry, Presbyterians in Ireland were once again suffering persecution inflicted upon them by the official Church of Ireland. It is likely that many Scots-Irish settlers continued to distrust the Anglicans wherever they came into contact with them. However, it is also clear from his critical descriptions that Woodmason held no sympathy for the culture and practices of those settlers.

In many cases, Woodmason mistook traditional ritual and revivalist practices among the settlers for ignorance and obscenity. He said, "There are so many Absurdities committed by them, as wou'd shock one of our Cherokee Savages…"[85] Yet, what he witnessed was not absurd to the evangelical population to which he administered. It is easy to tell by his descriptions that what he observed was not an innovation brought to the area by northern missionaries but rather a tradition rooted in Scots-Irish piety:

> Had any such Assembly as last Sunday when they communicated, the Honest Heathens would have imagin'd themselves rather amidst a Gang of frantic Lunatics broke out of Bedlam, rather than among a Society of

[82]Charles Woodmason, Journal, Sunday January 25, 1767. Found in Kidd, 120.
[83]Ibid, 121.
[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid, 122.

> religious Christians, met to celebrate the most sacred and Solemn Ordinance of their Religion [the Lord's Supper]. Here, one Fellow mounted on a Bench with Bread, and bawling, *See the Body of Chris,* Another with the cup running around, and bellowing—*Who cleanses his Soul with the Blood of Christ*, and a thousand other Extravagancies—One on his knees in a Posture of Prayer—Others singing—some howling—These Ranting—Those Crying—Others dancing, Skipping, Laughing and rejoycing.[86]

Woodmason experienced a traditional Scots-Irish revival not unlike the one described by Stewart in Ulster during 1625. What Woodmason interpreted as chaos, lunacy, and extravagance, the participants understood as a communal ritual that celebrated communal piety and tradition. These rituals seemed truly communal in that women as well as men possessed active roles as they did in Scotland and Ulster. Woodmason noted that, "Here two or 3 Women falling on their Backs, kicking up their Heels, exposing their Nakedness to all Bystanders and others sitting Pensive, in deep Melancholy lost in Abstraction, like Statues, quite insensible…"[87] The settlers believed that their emotions and expressions were the working of the Holy Spirit among a chosen people. This experience confirmed their place among the sanctified and marked the spiritual rejuvenation of the community there in the Carolinas as it did across the sea in Cambuslang or Ulster.[88]

Evidence of authoritative approval within the community is presented by Woodmason when he discusses their leaders saying that, "Their Teacher, so far from condemning, or reproving, them, call'd it, the Work of God, and returned Thanks for Actions deserving of the Pillory and Whipping Post."[89] Actions that Woodmason, as a

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[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Cambuslang was a large revival that took place in Scotland during one of George Whitefield's tours in 1742.

[89]Woodmason, 122.

member of the established, respectable, and thereby restrictive church, condemned as transgressions against "Decency, Modesty, and Morality, in such an Open Public Manner," were public declarations of spiritual and religious power for those involved. A power and authority that was available to women as well as men.[90]

In the context of a communal and evangelical faith like the Presbyterianism held by many Scots-Irish immigrants, religion was a public as well as a communal matter. Woodmason mentions that before members were baptized they had to publically "give an Account of…Secret Calls, Conviction, Conversion, Repentance &c &c."[91] While Woodmason found persons's "Visions, Dreams, Revelations—and the like" farcical, members of the community viewed them as spiritual affirmations, or symbols of belonging, just as the prefacers of Somervel, Cairns, and West did. Presbyterain religious leaders—most of them probably laymen—in the backcountry understood and respected the spiritual experiences of their co-religionists. These revivals, rather than being new manifestations, were part of the spiritual legacy of the immigrants. They were public expressions available to both men and women that supplied the participant with acknowledged piety and place within the body of faith.

Presbyterians, whether they were found in the Carolina backcountry, the small towns of Ulster, or the cities of Scotland, shared common religious understandings and assumptions that were played out in rituals like that of the Holy Fair and the revivals associated with it. The evangelical nature of these fairs and revivals, with their emphasis on emotion and spirituality, created a religious world in which women were active

[90]Ibid.
[91]Ibid, 123.

participants, supported by layman as well as their ministers. Women took part in communion services which acknowledged their belonging to the group of believers. They demonstrated emotional responses to hearing the gospel at revivals, and they experienced spiritual manifestations of the Lord's Holy Spirit which confirmed their conviction of grace, and thus, their place among God's elect. Assuming the mantle of authority, they wrote about their spiritual journeys, claimed the worth of their souls as equal before God to the souls of men, and sought to instruct the generations that would follow them.

The purpose of this paper was fairly simple. It sought to highlight some of the ways Presbyterian women participated in their religious world and to show that, especially through writing, they could wield spiritual authority, and create a sense of self, whether that self was a mystic, a humble woman of prayer, or an ardent nationalist. Hopefully, it has accomplished that goal; however, there are many areas of this topic that were only briefly touched upon, such as the nature of women's activities in the colonial church, or the relationship of Presbyterian women to their ministers, that deserve more exploration. Noticeably absent from the discussion above is the restriction of influence that women encountered in the nineteenth-century in not only Presbyterianism, but other denominations as well. Thus, much work is yet to be done in uncovering the patterns and shifts in religious thought, especially in regards to women and their role within the church and society.

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